

Refining realist program theory

for THE REALIST HIVE

REALIST RESEARCH EVALUATION AND LEARNING INITIATIVE (RREALI)

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Charles Darwin University acknowledges all First Nations people across the lands on which we live and work, and we pay our respects to Elders both past and present.

Introducing RREALI

Realist Research Evaluation & Learning Initiative (RREALI) –
The Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University

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Realist evaluation a methodology, not a method

- No prescribed process for testing and refining program theory (data analysis).
- Quality standards say:
 - “...not a specific method” but a “process... of interrogating program theory”.
 - “...overall approach to data analysis is “retroductive (it moves between inductive and deductive processes...)”.
 - “...how data are used to further develop, confirm, refute or refine program theory should be described and justified”.

(Greenhalgh et al 2017).

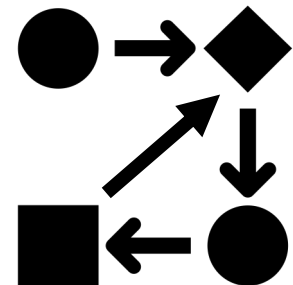
What

Three worked examples on a spectrum of more to less structured.



Most structured approach

- Both realist evaluation and realist review
- 7 program theories – 7-8 rounds of refinement
- Steps:
 - Realist review – the messy excel
 - Expert panel
 - Diagramming
 - Coding
 - Realist expert feedback on CMO construction
 - Interviews
 - Example quotations
 - Refinement of program theories



Example table for the collation of potential refinements

CMO	Org 1 – Interview 1	Org 2 – Interview 3	Org 4 – Interview 2
CMO1	Did not require Mechanisms of ‘staff knowledge of OHL’ to achieve the O	Did not require a Context of ‘Government Focus’ to achieve the O.	Did not use tools
CMO2	Required an additional Context of ‘Accreditation’ to achieve the O.	Did not require the Mechanism of ‘shared responsibility’ to achieve the O.	Did not have the Context of ‘Identified need to improve OHL’ but still achieved the O.

Feedback from a realist expert on CMO construction

Mechanism	My comments	Changes to be made
Commitment from Executive	<p>Executive Leadership is the Outcome</p> <p>Commitment from executive is the resource.</p> <p>‘because it gives an authorising environment for the staff’ is the reasoning.</p>	<p>Commitment from executive to be removed as an M in the ‘Executive leadership’ pattern as this is a circular argument.</p> <p>Commitment from executive to then be listed as the ‘context’ in all other patterns and to be combined with existing C of ‘exec commitment to person centred care (PCC)’ in CMOs where this C is present – this C will now be referred to as ‘executive commitment to PCC &/or OHL’.</p>
Culture of quality improvement	<p>Realist expert states that a ‘culture of quality improvement’ is context.</p> <p>Expert stated that for it to be an M, it would need to be ‘staff are committed to quality improvement because they believe it will improve client outcomes’.</p>	<p>Move to context</p>
Workforce Development	<p>As it is currently called it is either an action or an outcome. For it to be a M it needs to be renamed to ‘staff knowledge and skills in OHL’.</p>	<p>Leave as an M but rewrite it to ‘staff knowledge of OHL’</p>

Example table used for refinement justification for the refinement of the CMO patterns.

CMO Pattern	Change to be made	Quote
Executive commitment	Changed 'government policy' to 'government focus' as it was realised that it was too exclusive and wasn't encompassing all it needed to.	<p>"I think government policy is too narrow – it was not just the government policy, it is also in our funding agreement with the government."</p> <p>"The government provides the external pressure that drive OHL as a priority. It is a part of their new government health reform and it is also a part of what the government focuses of for our KPIs."</p>
	Added 'org commitment to person centred care (PCC)' to context as stated in 1 interview	"We would not have been able to change so many policies and procedure without our executives being committed to patient-centred approaches."
HL embedded in existing practices	Added M of 'consumer input' as stated in 1 interview	"We had a consumer network. They informed this whole project.... they made it real."

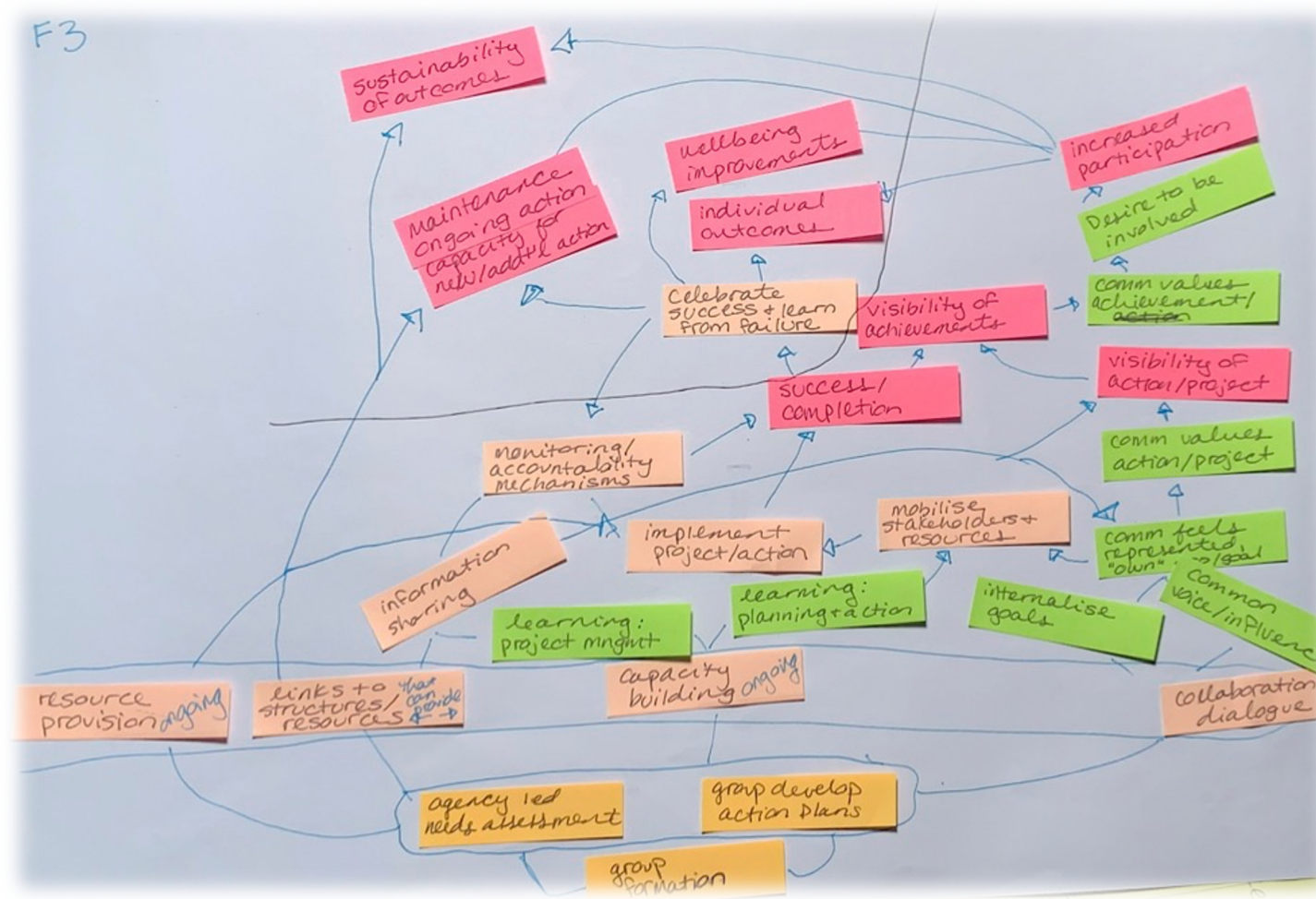
Least Structured Approach

- Both realist evaluation and realist review
- Steps:
 - Coding
 - Rereading
 - Visualisation and organisation
 - Example quotations
 - Diagramming and writing CMOs

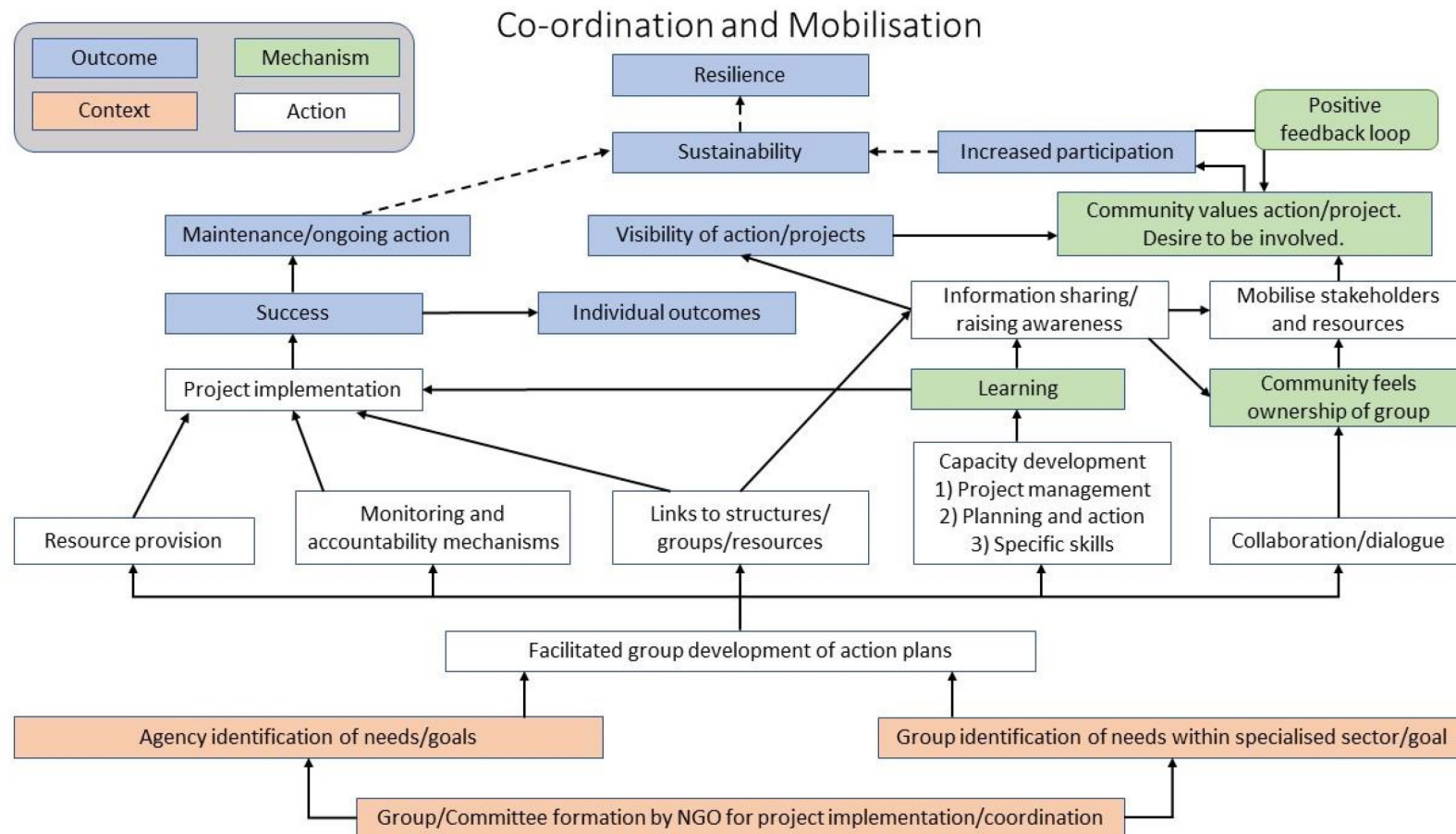


In progress...the stickies

Examples shown are reproduced with permission from the *Impact of Community – Led Development on Food Security (InCLuDE)* project, funded under the Implementer-led Design, Evidence, Analysis and Learning (IDEAL) activity, funded by the USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance.



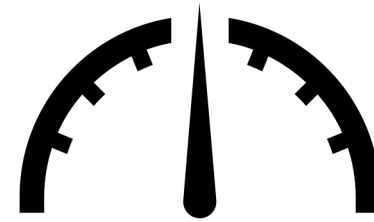
Revised program theory



Evidencing theory

Table 5-8 Mobilization and Feedback Loop Aspects

Mobilization and Feedback loop elements	Evidenced in	No. of reports evidenced in
Strong dialogue and planning participation	39 ; 82 ; 104	3
Program goals internalized	51 ; 52 ; 82 ; opposite ³⁵ 10 or 28	3 (Opposite: 2)
Common voice	51 ; 66	2
Groups share information, awareness raising	25 ; 29 ; 34 ; 47 ; 48 ; 51 ; 66 ; 104	8
Community ownership of group goals & actions	47 ; 52 ; 80 ; 81 ; 90 ; not 82	5 (Opposite: 1)
Linkages to structures/networks/resources aid awareness raising	2 ; 39 ; 47 ; 90 ; 100	5
Groups mobilize stakeholders and resources	10 ; 29 ; 34 ; 44 ; 80 ; 100 ; 104	7
Community members value the project	39 ; 47 ; 100	3
Increased desire to participate	100 ; 104	2
Increased participation	66 ; 104	2

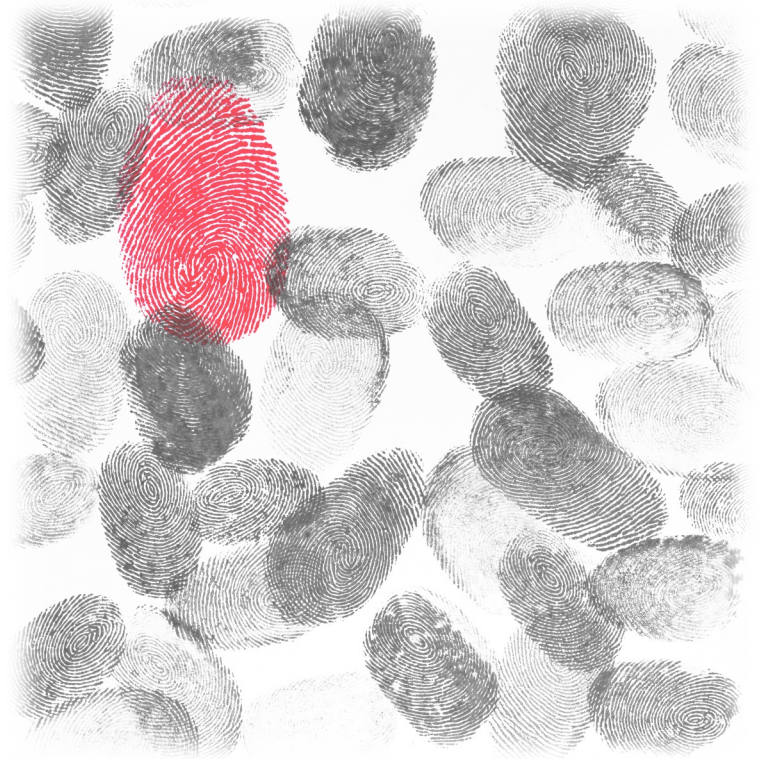


In the middle...

- Theory refinement while coding: Theory title as code; each C, M, and O as sub-code
 - Deductive coding to existing sub-codes, abductive coding to new sub-codes
 - Refinement: creation, renaming, merging and deletion of sub-codes; coding of interactions (C-M, M-O)
- Coding & refinement samples reviewed and verified
- Incorporation of formal theory while drafting results

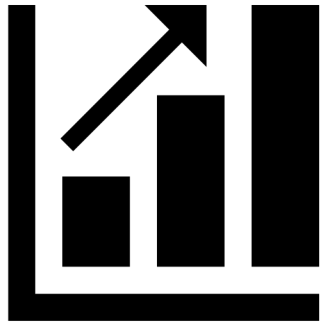
Evidencing theory refinement

- Different approaches:
 - Liz – tracking via tables and spreadsheets
 - Kerry – changing code structure, samples reviewed by others
 - Cara – evolving program theory diagrams, each refinement evidenced by quotes
- Transparency!



Quantitative Data

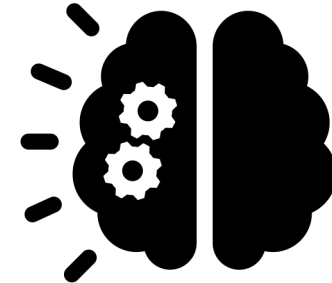
Incorporated in various ways; iterative



- Can inform collection of qualitative data
- Outcome patterns and possible contexts (subgroups)
- Realist surveys – test mechanisms with survey data
- Use of non-realist secondary data

Reflection & conclusion

- The intellectual thinking is the same but the practical processes differ.
- Consistency with realism (generative causation) and transparent reporting are what matter.



Thank you!